

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 21, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson, Chair; George Estrada, Vice Chair; Florisca Carter, Secretary; Ruben Felipe, William Marshall, Harry Weichsel, Charles Valentino, Sr.

OTHERS: Atty. Steven Mednick, Atty. Ed Maley; Atty. Mark Anastasi (8:06 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Simpson called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The following corrections were noted:

Page 1, under **ATTENDANCE**: please change “Rueben Felipe” to “Ruben Felipe”

Page 1, under **OTHERS**: please change “Atty. Ed Bailey” to “Atty. Ed Maley”.

Page 5, paragraph 2, line 1: please change “Attorney Estrada” to “Mr. Estrada”

**** MR. ESTRADA MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 14, 2012 AS CORRECTED.**

**** MR. FELIPE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 14, 2012 AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

SCHEDULING OF FUTURE MEETINGS.

Mr. Felipe said that there were letters sent to Bridgeport residents inviting the following residents to come to testify before the Commission. :

Korene Garcia, Bpt. District Wide PAC President; Mary Pat Healy, Bpt. Child Advocate Coalition; Mr. Gary Peluchette, Bpt. Education Association, Marge Hiller, Bpt. Public Education Fund; Maria Zambrano, Excel Bridgeport; New Haven Mayor John Stefano, Hartford Mayor Pedro Segarra, Paul Vallas, Interim Bpt. Public School Superintendent; Paul Timpanelli, Bridgeport Regional Business Council; Maria Perreira, former BOE member; Barbara Bellinger, former BOE member; Tom Mulligan, former Council Member; Leticia Colon,

former BOE member and current Council member; Ms. Nereyda Robles, Sauda Baraka, Bobby Simpson, Tom Cunningham, and Delores Fuller.

Atty. Mednick said that he had confirmed some of the experts to come for testimony at the March 6th and he was continuing to work on the 8th. Others have been invited for the 13th.

Mr. Felipe said that there would be testimony from numerous experts and pointed out that there would need to be different venues, particularly since there may be strong public interest. Mr. Estrada suggested having some daytime meetings at Burroughs Library. Discussion followed about possible venues and possibly doing brown bag lunches. Mr. Felipe pointed out that one public hearing was required, but having more would be better. He said that moving the expert testimony to a neighborhood would be unfair.

He said that by the next Tuesday meeting, he expected IT to have a link on the website that would allow people to have access to the schedule and the website. Ms. Simpson said that The Connecticut Post has graciously offered to assist in getting the public notice out.

****MR. FELIPE MOVED TO FORM A THREE MEMBER OUTREACH COMMITTEE WITH GEORGE ESTRADA AS THE CHAIR.**

**** Mr. VALENTINO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Felipe said that Mr. Estrada would be the Chair along with Mr. Valentino, and Rev. Marshall. The sole purpose will be to hear testimony.

Mayor Finch joined the meeting at 7:33 p.m. during a recess for the Council Meeting. He left the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

It was decided that there would be meetings Wednesday afternoons in March 7th; March 21st; and April 4th; from 12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m. at locations to be determined. Mr. Felipe will email the locations to the members for confirmation in the next few days.

It was stated that there had been stated that there would be an "Education Only" public hearing. This will be scheduled on March 20th for the Public Hearing at City Hall. Following this, it was decided that it would be good to have one on the 12th. On April 17th, Atty. Mednick said that he would be out of town on business. It was decided to move the public hearing from the 12th to the 17th at the Annex.

Mr. Estrada said that he was much more comfortable with the fact that there were several opportunities for the public to give input.

The discussion then moved to having a member of the Committee act as a liaison with the media.

**** MR. ESTRADA MOVED TO NOMINATE MR. FELIPE TO ACT AS A LIAISON FOR THE MEDIA.**

**** MR. VALENTINO SECONDED.**

Discussion followed about how to make sure the public is aware of the various meetings. Mr. Estrada suggested that perhaps he and Mr. Felipe might be able to do a short announcement in Spanish on the local Spanish radio station. Ms. Simpson reminded everyone that the Commission has already exceeded the required meetings. She said that she felt that this process has been as open as possible.

Mr. Felipe stated that the February 28th meeting would be focused on the Department heads and the meeting on March 1st would be focused on the City Council.

**** THE MOTION TO NOMINATE MR. FELIPE TO ACT AS A LIAISON FOR THE MEDIA PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

EDIT, REVIEW, REDLINE AND DISCUSSION OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE CHARTER

Atty. Anastasi joined the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

Public Facilities

Mr. Estrada, the former Public Facilities Department head, then pointed out that he would like to bring up the issue of parking. The City disbanded a Parking Authority some time earlier. However, now because of the growth of downtown, there should be an authority to oversee the economic development. He pointed out that a Parking Authority would also have the ability to bond. He said that it would be good to consider the ability to reinstate a Parking Authority.

Atty. Mednick commented that there would probably be three different types of Commissions, the first category should be created and determined by the Charter; Category 2 would be Commissions that are simply required by Charter while the actual configuration of the Commission is determined in the ordinances; and the last category would contain the authority to create Commissions as needed. Atty. Anastasi said that this was an illustration of how a Charter could become bogged down with unnecessary Boards and Commissions that really should be in the Code of Ordinances. Both Mr. Felipe and Atty. Maley said that they would like to know why the Parking Authority was disbanded.

Atty. Maley agreed that this chapter was a perfect example of why the Commissions should be moved to the Code of Ordinances. He pointed out that the current 12 page chapter could be reduced to about a page and a half.

The discussion then moved to some language about parks and open space that was obscure. A reference to the use of the word "telegraphs" was noted.

It was also noted that Beechwood Park was now Central High School. Atty. Mednick asked if the section regarding Beechwood Park could be removed since the high school is there. Atty. Anastasi said that one issue was that if the City ever stopped using the school, it would have to revert back to parkland.

Discussion followed about this. Atty. Mednick said that he wanted to segregate the various sections that had to do with Special Acts into their own section. This will streamline the body of the Charter. Both Atty. Mednick and Maley said that there was very little in this section that was not superseded by General Statutes. Atty. Anastasi said that there were only two issues that had proved cumbersome, such as the disposal of parkland and the replacement of parkland, both of which do function.

Police

Atty. Mednick said that the Police Commission and Fire Commission would be moved to a different section.

Mr. Felipe said that there had been prior discussions about having a uniform process for selecting a Police Chief. Having uniformity with many of the positions as possible should be a goal. Atty. Anastasi reviewed the details around the limit of the Police Chief and Fire Chief to 2 five year term limits. Discussion followed.

Atty. Mednick said that section regarding the removal of Police Commissioners or Fire Commissioners would also be relocated in the section for Commission.

He also pointed out that there were some collective bargaining issues that would limit the actions of the administration to suspension of the Police Chief. He said that it would be good to have Labor Relations review the disciplinary issues for the Police and Fire Departments, most of which would be dictated by Collective Bargaining.

Ms. Simpson suggested that due to time constraints the Commission skip the Civil Service and moved to the section of Education.

Atty. Mednick said that this section was very brief. It did not include the appointment of a Superintendent or Board members. Mr. Estrada said that he would like to understand the delineation between the City and the District. Atty. Mednick said that this was a burning question and if there was a municipal attorney and an education attorney in the room, there would be a major debate.

Mr. Estrada asked what degree of transparency was allowed by law. Atty. Mednick said that the current trends were for transparency, accountability and public access by the U.S. Council of Mayors and other groups. A large packet of information on this issue will be forthcoming.

Concerns about the fact that there were students who had no textbooks, but administrators who had assistants who also had their own assistants were expressed. Atty. Mednick said that he believed that language could be created to require the District to provide more accountability. Mr. Weichsel pointed out that regardless of who the Mayor of a given city was, the Mayor was responsible for how that money is spent. Atty. Maley pointed out that what the State has said historically over the course of the last 200 years, the Board of Education is not answerable to the Mayor, but to the State. This means that there is a State function, in terms an Educational District that the local taxes fund. Atty. Anastasi noted that State law does not required that the Board of Education be an elective body. He said that he felt that the Mayor was looking for more accountability. Ms. Simpson said that the best way to do this was to have some legal language that will work within the construct of the State Statutes.

Atty. Mednick pointed out that the law was originally created when the mayors had total control over the budgets and was a result of the progressive movement. This was during a pre-union time. Ultimately, this is a governance issue at the level of accountability and transparency.

Mr. Valentino left the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Libraries

Mr. Felipe said that it was a difficult to have a board appoint its own successors, which would be subject to the approval of the Council. He said that he did not understand why this was done differently. Atty. Maley pointed out that originally, libraries were private entities. The process of having the board being self-perpetuating is something that was commonly practiced in private enterprise.

Atty. Anastasi then gave a brief overview of the current Library policy, which has now has a designated funding percentage of 1% of the mill rate, which the Library Board can spend however it sees fit. Mr. Estrada said that there should be some mechanism for accountability. Atty. Anastasi pointed out that this was a microcosm of a lump sum of money going to an organization with no accountability. He reminded everyone that this had been the result of a referendum question. The only means of input is by nomination of candidates to the Library Board. Discussion followed. It was decided to see what the CAO had to say about this.

Ms. Simpson said that next Thursday night, it would be good to review Civil Service, and the remaining departments.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. WEICHSEL MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** MR. ESTRADA SECONDED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services